

Temple-Atelier-Musée Wiertz / Maison-Musée Gustave Moreau. A critical comparison.

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Abstract

In a 1931 essay on Antoine Wiertz poet-critic Fritz-René Vanderpyl remarks that Wiertz and Gustave Moreau could be classified as absolute opposites, yet resemble each other in the way “leur persévérance ait donné d’identiques résultats négatifs”. In this paper I take up this suggestion of a comparison between the Brussels Romanticist and the Parisian proto-symbolist who both chose to keep the major part of their artistic production together and strategically employed the format of a personal museum as vehicle for their aspired fame. On the one hand they are indeed comparable as encompassing idiosyncratic museum projects of self-proclaimed geniuses who are after future recognition, and as relatively rare early cases of painter’s museums at a time when memorial museums were, for multiple reasons, still mainly a phenomenon of sculptors. On the other hand, key differences open up questions about the temporalities and means of making public an *oeuvre complet*, about managing the contours of the artist as public subject, and about the importance of architecture and the installation of collections in crafting the presentation of one’s artistic legacy. Posthumous alterations in both the Musée Wiertz and the Maison-Musée Moreau demonstrate how purposeful ambiguities have been levelled out. The Temple-Atelier-Musée Wiertz was gradually ‘sanitized’ from various eccentricities and shrunk into a more conventional picture gallery. In the former house and studio of Moreau, in contrast, the parts open to the public were gradually extended beyond what Moreau had envisaged and authorized, flattening out the museological performance to that of a historic house museum rather than acknowledging it as artistic (meta) project in itself.

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